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City, KS (US)(52) **U.S. Cl. 424/208.1; 514/44 R**(21) Appl. No.: **13/185,158**(57) **ABSTRACT**(22) Filed: **Jul. 18, 2011****Related U.S. Application Data**(63) Continuation of application No. 10/941,164, filed on
Sep. 15, 2004, now Pat. No. 7,488,485.(60) Provisional application No. 60/503,194, filed on Sep.
15, 2003.

The present invention is directed to a DNA vaccine for immunization against HIV. The invention comprises a DNA molecule that has a sequence encoding a plurality of viral proteins capable of stimulating an immune response against HIV. The DNA molecule is rendered safe for use as a vaccine by the disruption of genes encoding reverse transcriptase, integrase, and Vif. The DNA molecule is further rendered safe by at least a partial deletion of the 3' LTR.

FIG. 1

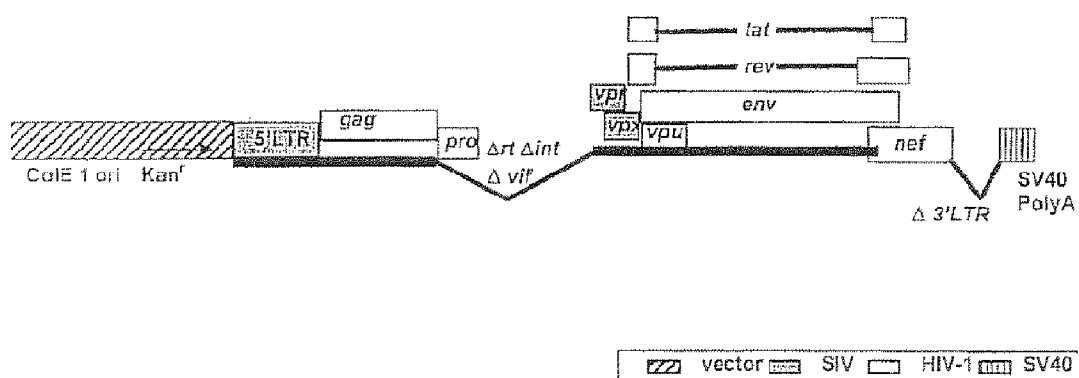
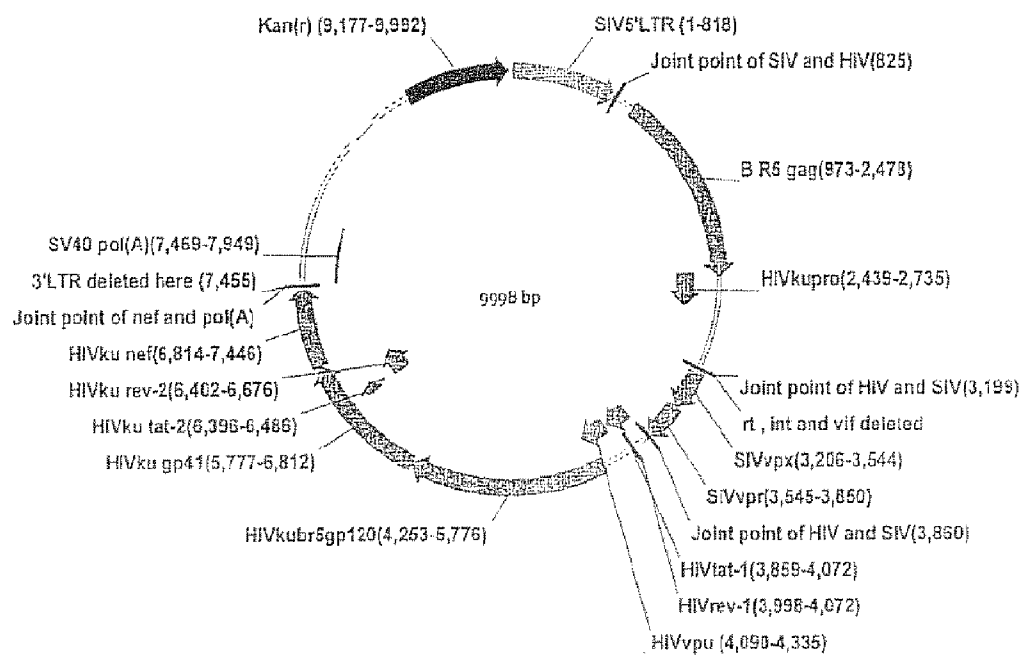


FIG. 2



HIV DNA VACCINE METHODS OF USE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] The application claims benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/503,197, filed Sep. 16, 2003; U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/368,151, filed Feb. 9, 2009; and U.S. Pat. No. 7,488,485, filed Sep. 15, 2004. This application is a divisional of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/368,151.

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT RIGHTS

[0002] This work was supported in part by NIH grant numbers G1401830 and G1402500. The government of the United States of America may have rights in this invention.

FIELD OF INVENTION

[0003] The present invention relates generally to the field of prophylactic vaccines for generating protection from HIV-1 induced disease and infection. More specifically, the present invention relates to DNA vaccines against the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

[0004] By the end of the year 2000, an estimated 36.1 million people worldwide were infected with HIV. In that year alone, HIV/AIDS-associated illnesses claimed the lives of approximately 3 million people worldwide. An estimated 500,000 of those deaths were of children under the age of fifteen. The importance of an HIV vaccine with respect to world health cannot be overstated.

[0005] It is recognized that effective vaccines that will inhibit or prevent HIV-1 infection or HIV-1 induced disease in humans will be useful for the treatment of certain high-risk populations, and as a general prophylactic vaccination for the general population that may risk HIV-1 infection or HIV-1 induced disease. A vaccine that will confer long-term protection against the transmission of HIV-1 would be most useful. Unfortunately, numerous problems stand in the way of developing effective vaccines for the prevention of HIV-1 infection and disease. Certain problems are most likely the result of the unique nature of the HIV-1 virus and its functional properties, and as yet no effective vaccine has been developed (for review, see: Berzofsky et al., *Developing Synthetic Peptide Vaccines for HIV-1*, *Vaccines* 95, pps. 135-142, 1995; Cease and Berzofsky, *Toward a Vaccine for AIDS: The Emergence of Immunobiology-Based Vaccine Design*, *Annual Review of Immunology*, 12:923-989; Berzofsky, *Progress Toward Artificial Vaccines for HIV*, *Vaccines* 92, pps. 40-41, 1992).

[0006] HIV is a retrovirus, meaning that its genome consists of RNA rather than DNA. There are two primary strains of the virus, designated HIV-1 and HIV-2, with HIV-1 being the strain that is primarily responsible for human infection. The RNA genome of HIV is surrounded by a protein shell. The combination of RNA genome and the protein shell is known as the nucleocapsid, which is in turn surrounded by an envelope of both protein and lipid.

[0007] Infection of host cells by HIV begins when the gp120 protein of HIV, a highly glycosylated protein located in the viral envelope, binds to the CD4 receptor molecule of a host cell. This interaction initiates a series of events that allow fusion between the viral and cell membranes and the subsequent entry of the virus into the cell.

[0008] Following entry into the host cell, HIV RNA is transcribed into double-stranded DNA by a viral reverse transcriptase enzyme. Once integrated into the host genome, HIV expresses itself through transcription by the host's RNA Polymerase II enzyme. Through both transcriptional control and posttranscriptional transcript processing, HIV is able to exert a high level of control over the extent to which it expresses itself.

[0009] Studies of the HIV virus have revealed much information about the molecular biology of the virus, including information concerning a number of genes and genetic regions important to the pathogenicity of HIV. Among these important genes and regions are *rt*, *int*, *vif*, and the 3' LTR of HIV.

[0010] The *rt* gene of HIV encodes viral reverse transcriptase. This enzyme utilizes the RNA genome of HIV to produce a corresponding linear double-stranded DNA molecule that can be incorporated into the host genome.

[0011] The *int* gene of HIV encodes an integrase. This is the enzyme that actually catalyzes the insertion of the reverse-transcriptase-produced linear double-stranded viral DNA into the host genome. In order to complete integration of the viral DNA into the host genome, the host cell DNA repair machinery performs a ligation of the host and viral DNAs.

[0012] The *vif* gene of HIV encodes a protein known as the 'viral infectivity factor.' This protein is required for the production of infectious virions. The protein likely overcomes a cellular inhibitor that otherwise inhibits HIV-1, and may also enhance the stability of the viral core and the preintegration complex.

[0013] The LTR (Long Terminal Repeat) regions of HIV-1 contain promoter regions necessary to drive expression of the HIV genes. The 5' LTR of HIV-1 contains the promoter that is primarily responsible for driving HIV-1 gene expression, though if the 5' LTR sequence is disrupted, the 3' LTR may assume this function. The 3' LTR is necessary for integration of the viral DNA into the host genome.

[0014] Among other important HIV-1 genes are *gag*, *pol*, *nef*, and *vpu*.

[0015] The *gag* gene encodes for, among other things, the p27 capsid protein of HIV. This protein is important in the assembly of viral nucleocapsids. The p27 protein is also known to interact with the HIV cellular protein CyA, which is necessary for viral infectivity. Disruption of the interaction between p27 and CyA has been shown to inhibit viral replication.

[0016] The *pol* gene contains the *rt* and *int* sequences of HIV-1, thus encoding, among other things, reverse transcriptase and integrase.

[0017] The *nef* gene product (known as Negative Factor, or Nef) has a number of potentially important properties. Nef has the ability to downregulate CD4 and MHC Class I proteins, both of which are important to the body's ability to recognize virus-infected cells. Nef has also been shown to activate cellular protein kinases, thereby interfering with the signaling processes of the cell. Perhaps most importantly, deletion of *nef* from a pathogenic clone of Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV) renders the virus nonpathogenic in adult macaque monkeys. Thus, a functional *nef* gene is crucial for the ability of SIV to cause disease *in vivo*. Further, studies have shown that HIV positive individuals with large deletions in the *nef* gene remained healthy for well over ten years, with no reduction in cellular CD4 counts.

[0018] The vpu gene encodes a protein of originally unknown function (known as Viral Protein, Unknown, or Vpu), but which is now known to downregulate CD4 and MHC Class-I expression as well as promote viral budding. Vpu is also similar to another viral protein that acts as an ion channel. The vpu gene is present in HIV-1, but is absent in HIV-2.

[0019] In nearly all viral infections, certain segments of the infected population recover and become immune to future viral infection by the same pathogen. Examples of typical viral pathogens include measles, poliomyelitis, chicken pox, hepatitis B, and small pox. The high mortality rate of HIV-1 infection, and the extremely rare incidence of recovery and protective immunity against HIV-1 infection, has cast doubt on the ability of primates to generate natural immunity to HIV-1 infection when pathogenic HIV-1 is the unmodified wild-type viral pathogen. Thus, there is a great need for a vaccine that will confer upon primate populations protective immunity against HIV-1 virus.

[0020] A hallmark of resistance to future viral infection is the generation of 'neutralizing antibodies' capable of recognizing the viral pathogen. Another measure is cellular immunity against infected cells. In typical viral infections, generation of neutralizing antibodies and cellular immunity heralds recovery from infection. In HIV-1 infection, however, neutralizing antibodies and cellular immunity appear very early during the infection and have been associated with only a transient decrease in viral burden. In spite of the generation of neutralizing antibodies and cellular immunity, viral replication in HIV-1 infection rebounds and AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) develops. Thus, in HIV-1 infection, neutralizing antibodies and cellular immunity are not accurate measures of protective immunity.

[0021] A further problem in developing an effective vaccine for HIV-1 is the antigenic diversity of the wild-type virus. There is a strong possibility that vaccines generated via recombinant HIV-1 coat proteins will confer resistance to specific phenotypes of virus and not broad spectrum immunity. Vaccine development using recombinant HIV-1 gp120 peptide, a HIV-1 viral coat protein, has passed phase-one clinical trials showing no toxicity. Data has indicated, however, that neutralizing antibodies appeared only transiently. Thus, recombinant HIV-1 gp120-peptide vaccines may act only in the short-term, with reversion to susceptibility of infection occurring in the future.

[0022] In general, it is accepted that live-virus vaccines induce better immunity against pathogenic viruses than isolated viral proteins (see, for example, Putkonen et al., Immunization with Live Attenuated SIV_{mac} Can Protect Macaques Against Mucosal Infection with SIV_{sm} Vaccines 96, pps. 200-210, 1996; Dimmock and Primrose *Introduction to Modern Virology*, Fourth Ed., Blackwell Science, 1994). The use of live lentivirus vaccines, such as HIV-1 vaccine, is resisted because of great concern that the virus will persist indefinitely in the inoculated population because of integration of the viral DNA into the host DNA of the inoculated individuals (see, for example, Haaft et al., Evidence of Circulating Pathogenic SIV Following Challenge of Macaques Vaccinated with Live Attenuated SIV, *Vaccines* 96, pps. 219-224, 1996). Thus, a safe and effective vaccine against HIV-1 will encompass modifications to prevent the development of virulent pathogenic infection that could occur by either random mutation or other change to the initially non-pathogenic vaccine virus.

One possibility for such a vaccine could come in the form of a DNA vaccine against HIV-1.

[0023] DNA vaccines are generally injected into host tissues in the form of plasmid DNA or RNA molecules via needle or particle bombardment. Once delivered, the DNA induces expression of antigenic proteins within transfected cells. U.S. Pat. No. 6,194,389 describes methods for transferring DNA to vertebrate cells to produce physiological immune-response producing protein in an animal subject and is incorporated herein in its entirety by reference.

[0024] Testing of vaccine efficacy generally requires the challenge of a subject with live virus or DNA. It is ethically and practically difficult to attempt preliminary studies using human subjects. The use of model systems for preliminary design and testing of candidate vaccines has been hampered by various species-specific features of the virus. The HIV-1 virus itself is currently known only to infect certain rare and endangered species of chimpanzees in addition to humans. The feasibility of obtaining sufficient numbers of such endangered animals for full preliminary study of HIV-1 virus vaccines is quite low. It is preferable to use validated analogous animal model systems.

[0025] One analogous model system for HIV-1 has been the SIV_{mac} (Simian Immunodeficiency Virus, macaque) system. SIV infects a variety of simians, including macaques, but the differences between SIV and HIV make SIV of limited use as a potential human vaccine. There is, therefore, a need for a vaccine made from a virus that is closely related to HIV, but still infectious in an animal model for purposes of testing.

[0026] Chimeric SIV-HIV virus has been developed by placing the envelope proteins of HIV-1 on a background of SIV_{mac}. The chimeric virus proved to be infectious in monkeys, but did not result in full-blown AIDS or an accurate model to mimic HIV-1 infection monkeys.

[0027] As described below, the present invention teaches specific DNA constructs and methods that are effective in generating an immune response to HIV-1 in a vaccinated host.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

[0028] The present invention is directed to a DNA vaccine for immunization against HIV. The invention comprises a DNA molecule that has a sequence encoding a plurality of viral proteins capable of stimulating an immune response against HIV. The DNA molecule is rendered safe for use as a vaccine by the disruption of genes encoding reverse transcriptase, integrase, and Vif. The DNA molecule is further rendered safe by at least a partial deletion of the 3' LTR.

[0029] The DNA molecule of the present invention further includes an SV40 polyadenylation sequence. In addition, the DNA molecule of the present invention is preferably regulated by a natural SIV promoter sequence.

[0030] The present invention is also directed to a method of immunizing an individual against HIV by administering the present DNA vaccine to said individual.

[0031] The present invention is further directed toward a vaccine against multiple HIV subtypes as well as viruses other than HIV, said vaccine produced by substituting genes from said other viruses for the orthologous HIV and/or SIV genes described herein.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0032] FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram of the $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{Ku2}, DNA construct of the present invention.

[0033] FIG. 2 is a circular diagram of the $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA construct of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0034] The object of the present invention is to provide DNA vaccine compositions and methods that provide either protective immunity to uninfected subjects or therapeutic immunity to infected subjects.

[0035] One aspect of the present invention is directed to DNA molecules that encode viral proteins capable of stimulating an immune response against HIV. In preferred embodiments, the DNA vaccine encodes the gag, pro, vpx, vpr, nef, tat proteins of HIV or SIV.

[0036] Importantly, the DNA molecules of the present invention have been disrupted functionally such that the ability to encode proteins that are important in pathogenicity are removed. More specifically, preferred embodiments functionally disrupt the vif, int and rt genes of the DNA vaccine. Other embodiments functionally disrupt the rt gene. It is anticipated that the DNA can be disrupted functionally by inserting or deleting at least one nucleotide such that the number of nucleotides in the altered sequences differs with respect to the unaltered sequences. It is also anticipated that the DNA encoding pathogenicity-related proteins can be disrupted functionally by substituting one or more nucleotides that encode functional amino acids with one or more distinct nucleotides that encode non-functional amino acids. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the functional disruption of the DNA encoding pathogenicity-related proteins occurs via deletion of the rt, int, and vif genes.

[0037] Another important aspect of this invention is that it provides for DNA vaccines that disrupt the 3' LTR sequences that enable undesirable integration of DNA sequences into the host genome. Function of the 3' LTR can also be abolished by substituting functional nucleotides with distinct non-functional nucleotides. The deleted 3' LTR region is preferably replaced with an SV40 polyadenylation sequence. Those skilled in the art will recognize that polyadenylation sites derived from a variety of sources other than SV40 may also be used as substitutes for the 3' LTR sequences.

[0038] A further aspect of the invention is the regulation of the DNA molecule of the present invention by use of the SHIV_{ku2} or SIV 5'LTR promoter (SEQ ID NO:7). This promoter drives the expression of viral proteins capable of stimulating an immune response against HIV present in the DNA vaccine. Those skilled in the art will recognize that alternative embodiments of this invention may substitute other functional promoter sequences that will also drive expression of the desired viral proteins.

EXAMPLES

Example 1

Construction of the $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA Construct

[0039] FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram of the $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA construct (SEQ ID NO:1) of the present invention. The construction of the present DNA vaccine $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA construct (SEQ ID NO:1) is performed as follows. The vector used for the present vaccine is pET-9a. The 2.3 kb EcoRI/Xmn I fragment of pET-9a is replaced with the approximately 7.4 kb modified SHIV_{ku2} provirus genome and the approximately 0.5 kb polyadenylation signal sequence of SV40 to yield an intermediate vector. EcoRI and Not I restriction

sites are created immediately upstream of the 5' LTR and at the end of the nef gene, respectively, in another intermediate vector. The reverse transcriptase (rt), integrase (int), and vif genes are eliminated by deletion of an approximately 2.5 kb DNA fragment between the downstream end of the pro gene and upstream of the vpx gene. The approximately 3.8 kb nucleotide sequence that encodes the envelope (env), nef, and 3' LTR genes of SHIV_{ku2} provirus genome is then replaced with the approximately 3.2 kb EcoRV/Not I DNA fragment that encodes the env and nef genes of HIV-1. The approximately 2.5 kb Nar I/BstE II DNA fragment that encodes the leader sequence, gag, and pro genes of SIV_{mac239} in SHIV_{ku2} is replaced with an approximately 2.4 kb Nar I/BstE II fragment that encodes the HIV-1 leader sequence, gag, and pro of HIV-1 to yield $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA construct (SEQ ID NO:1). Thus, the 5' LTR, vpx, and vpr genes of the present vaccine are from SIV_{mac239}, and the gag, pro, tat, rev, vpu, env, and nef are from HIV-1. The sequence of a preferred embodiment of the present DNA vaccine $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA is designated SEQ ID NO:1.

[0040] The information below is provided to detail structure of the $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA construct (SEQ ID NO:1) more completely. A 4,981 by fragment of SHIV_{ku2} that encodes the entire gag, and pol genes (which therefore includes the rt and int portions of the genome), as well as the first 472 by of the vif gene, is replaced with a 2,376 by DNA fragment of HIV-1 in the $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA construct. This 2,376 by fragment encodes the entire HIV-1 gag gene, and a portion of the HIV-1 pol gene (the entire region encoding protease is included; the nucleotides corresponding to the first 104 amino acids of reverse transcriptase have been removed; the int and vif genes have been completely removed. The 4,981 by fragment of SHIV_{ku2} that was replaced is designated SEQ ID NO:2. The DNA sequence of the first 472 by of the vif gene of SHIV_{ku2}, which was also replaced is designated SEQ ID NO:3. The DNA sequence of the 2,376 by fragment of HIV-1 used to replace the deleted 4,981 by and 472 by SHIV_{ku2} sequences (SEQ ID NO:2 and SEQ ID NO:3, respectively) is designated SEQ ID NO:4.

[0041] In addition to the above, a 411 by DNA fragment is deleted from the 3' LTR of SHIV_{ku2} to yield the $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA construct (SEQ ID NO:1). This deleted 3' LTR sequence is designated SEQ ID NO:5. In the $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA construct the deleted 3'LTR sequences are replaced with 481 by DNA sequence of the SV40 polyadenylation signal sequence that is designated SED ID NO:6.

Example 2

Efficacy of the $\Delta 2$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA Vaccine

[0042] Prior to detailing the functional aspects of the present invention, and the experimental results derived from its use, it is necessary to establish the efficacy of the present invention by way of comparison with that which has come before. Prior to the invention of the present vaccine, and subsequent testing thereof, the utility thereof as a vaccine was unknown.

[0043] It is known from previous studies conducted by the inventor of the present invention that a live virus vaccine against HIV is highly efficient in eliciting protection against the virus. To establish that a DNA vaccine could be just as efficient in providing such protection, an experiment utilizing five macaques was conducted. Three of the animals were injected with a $\Delta 2$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA (previously described as the

V7 embodiment in patent application Ser. No. 10/279,992, herein incorporated by reference in its entirety) wherein the rt and 3' LTR had been deleted to increase the safety of the vaccine. The $\Delta 2$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA also replaces the deleted 3' LTR sequence with the SV40 polyadenylation sequence. The remaining two animals were immunized with a live virus vaccine. The three animals vaccinated with the DNA vaccine were each given 2 mg of the DNA, injected intradermally, followed by an intramuscular injection of 5 mg of DNA six weeks later, and a third, 0.5 mg intramuscular DNA injection twelve weeks later. The macaques were challenged intravenously with an undiluted stock preparation of SHIV 89.6P twelve weeks after the final immunization. It is important to note that the same dose of the SERI 89.6P causes disease in 100% of inoculated control animals. The two macaques vaccinated with live virus were challenged ten weeks post-vaccination with the same SHIV virus.

[0044] When the animals were subsequently studied, it became clear that the DNA vaccine induces ELISPOT™ (Cellular Technology Limited, Cleveland, Ohio) responses against epitopes in the Env and Gag peptides, as well as neutralizing antibodies to SHIV_{ku2}. ELISPOT™ responses are hereby defined as measures of the number of cells expressing an indicated epitope. All three animals vaccinated with the DNA vaccine became infected with SHIV 89.6P, but each developed only low levels of viral RNA in plasma, with no loss of CD4 T-cells. The animals vaccinated with the DNA vaccine $\Delta 2$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA developed a massive anamnestic ELISPOT™ response following challenge. The infection in these animals has been controlled for more than 28 weeks. At the 28-week point, the three animals that were immunized with DNA vaccine demonstrated protection that was as efficient as animals immunized with the live vaccine. Thus, the DNA vaccine proved to be just as efficient as the live vaccine in eliciting protection against heterologous SHIV 89.6P. Further, the animals receiving the DNA vaccination did not have to bear the burden of prior infection with a live vaccine virus.

Example 3

In Vivo Efficacy of Both the $\Delta 2$ -SHIV_{ku2} and $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA Vaccines

[0045] Although the experiment described in Example 2 indicated the efficacy of the DNA vaccine $\Delta 2$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA lacking the rt gene and 3' LTR, it was not clear whether the current vaccine, the $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2}, would be efficacious as a vaccine. The uncertainty stems from the fact that the current vaccine $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} contains four deletions (rt, int, vif, and the 3' LTR), each deletion corresponding to a portion of the viral genome important in infectivity of the virus. The deletions were made in order to render the virus non-infectious and safe for use, but it was unknown whether these four deletions, in addition to the fact that a DNA rather than a live virus was being used, would render the vaccine incapable of providing protection against HIV-1. Surprisingly, the present virus proved to be just as efficient at inducing protection against heterologous SHIV 89.6P as the $\Delta 2$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA vaccine described in the live virus comparison of Example 2.

[0046] Three macaques were injected intramuscularly with 5 mg of the $\Delta 2$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA, while three other macaques were injected intramuscularly with 5 mg of the present $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA. The injections were repeated eleven weeks later, and the animals were challenged intravenously with undiluted stock of SHIV 89.6P six weeks after the sec-

ond immunization. All six of the animals developed ELISPOT™ responses to the vaccine three weeks after the first injection, the responses declining approximately three weeks later to undetectable levels. The responses appeared once again only one week after the second injection, and again declined to low levels. Only minimal responses were detected at the time of challenge. By one week after challenge, each of the animals had developed high titers of viral replication, which were matched by a powerful CMI (cell-mediated immune) response. By two weeks post-challenge, the viral burdens in the animals declined to levels between ten- and twenty-fold less than concentrations observed one week earlier. None of the animals lost CD4 T-cells. The ability of the DNAs to induce protection after only two injections underscores the potency of the DNA vaccines, and the results of the experiment clearly showed that, despite the additional deletions, the $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA construct DNA vaccine (SEQ ID NO:1) of the present invention was just as effective as the $\Delta 2$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA vaccine, which in turn was just as effective as the live virus vaccine.

Example 4

Utility of the SV40 Polyadenylation Sequence as a Substitute for the 3'LTR

[0047] A further experiment was performed to compare the utility of the SV40 polyadenylation sequences as substitutes for the 3' LTR sequence. This was accomplished by comparing the ability of the V5 embodiment SHIV_{ku2} DNA vaccine with an intact 3'LTR and the V6 embodiment SHIV_{ku2} DNA vaccine having the 3'LTR substituted with an SV40 polyadenylation sequence (SEQ ID NO: 6) to express vector-encoded viral proteins (both the V5 and V6 embodiments are described in patent application Ser. No. 10/279,992, herein incorporated by reference in its entirety). Performance of the two DNA molecules was compared in transfected primary human fibroblasts, the human embryonic kidney epithelial cell line 293, and in Jurkat cells, for expression of viral proteins in intra and extracellular compartments. The DNAs were also compared for duration of expression and for the amount of protein production, as well as for post translational modification and cleavage of precursor proteins. It was determined that the 3' LTR deleted V6 embodiment SHIV_{ku2} DNA vaccine construct, surprisingly, was more efficient in producing viral proteins than the V5 embodiment SHIV_{ku2} DNA vaccine construct having both LTRs. The duration of protein production was also longer in the 3' LTR deleted vaccine. Immunoprecipitation analysis revealed that deletion of the 3' LTR resulted in rapid cleavage of the gag precursor, yielding double the amount of p27 being exported to the extracellular compartment. Taken together, these data indicate that deletion of the 3' LTR not only alleviates concerns about integration of the viral genome into host DNA, but also results in a more efficient expression of viral proteins.

Example 5

Coadministration of Cytokines with $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA Vaccine

[0048] Next, a study was undertaken to ascertain whether the immune response induced by the present vaccine could be enhanced by co-administration of cytokines (for example, GM-CSF) DNA. BALB/C mice were immunized intramuscularly with a mixture of 100 μ g of $\Delta 4$ -SHIV_{ku2} DNA and 25

µg of mouse GM-CSF DNA. The injections were given twice, two weeks apart, and the mice were sacrificed one week after the second immunization. Splenocytes were tested for response to SIV Gag peptides divided into five groups in the ELISPOT™ assay. Even though the immunization doses were low and tissue samples were harvested early, before CMI responses could peak, all four animals that received GM-CSF DNA along with the vaccine DNA developed ELISPOT™ responses, varying from 20 to 40 cells/10⁶ splenocytes, whereas only 50% of the animals receiving the vaccine DNA alone developed such a response. The GM-CSF caused an impressive chemotactic effect, as evidenced by the large number of mononuclear cells that were concentrated at the site of injection. This effect attracted many more antigen-presenting dendritic cells to the site of the injection than evident in the animals that received the DNA vaccine only. Surprisingly, however, the mice that received both vaccine DNA and GM-CSF developed lower CMI titers than those receiving the DNA vaccine alone. That is, the number of viral protein specific ELISPOT™ positive cells generated by the vaccine alone was significantly higher than those generated by the vaccine plus GM-CSF. It is concluded that coadministration of the Δ4-SHIV_{kat2} DNA vaccine with a cytokine such as GM-CSF may be desirable in instances where it is either prophylactically or therapeutically desirable to increase the number of injected subjects that develop activated splenocytes.

[0049] Thus, the present DNA vaccine is useful for providing protection against HIV. The DNA used in the present invention was derived from SHIV_{kat2}, a virus that has a highly efficient replication strategy, making it highly pathogenic. The transcriptional machinery of the DNA was maintained by preserving the 5' LTR that houses the promoter/enhancer sequences of the viral DNA. In addition, the 5' LTR contains

binding sites for transcription factors such as NFκB, NFAT, SP-1, and the like, and the binding site for the RNA of tat, a molecule unique to HIV and the lentivirus that is responsible for the transactivation of viral DNA. The integrase gene and the 3' LTR were deleted to minimize the ability of the DNA to integrate into host cell DNA. Thus, the DNA cannot persist indefinitely in tissues. Furthermore, the deletion of the reverse transcriptase and vif genes crippled the ability of the genome to code for infectious virus. At the same time, the viral proteins encoded by the env, gag, vpu, tat, and nef genes were highly expressed in cells transfected with the DNA. The present DNA vaccine is highly immunogenic in macaques and elicits protective immunity against heterologous viruses. Importantly, the present vaccine can be used not only prophylactically, but also therapeutically in individuals already infected with HIV because the DNA may be injected at any time during a period when anti-retroviral drug therapy is in place.

[0050] The examples and disclosure provided above describe certain embodiments of the present invention, but are not meant to be limiting. It will be apparent to those of skill in the art, upon reading this disclosure, that the present invention may be modified in a number of ways without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention. For example, the env, gag, and nef genes described above could be excised and replaced with the corresponding genes from another subtype of HIV. Thus, the present vaccine could be used for immunization against various subtypes of HIV. Further, the env, gag, nef, and other genes described above could be replaced with genes from other viruses, such as SARS and Hepatitis C. Thus, the present DNA vaccine, described above, could be used as an 'engine' to drive expression of viral genes from other than HIV or SIV, thereby providing a DNA vaccine to a variety of other viruses. The present invention is limited only by the claims that follow.

SEQUENCE LISTING

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g	4981

<210> SEQ ID NO 3
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 <212> TYPE: DNA
 <213> ORGANISM: Artificial Sequence
 <220> FEATURE:
 <223> OTHER INFORMATION: Simian immunodeficiency virus/human
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<400> SEQUENCE: 3

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tatgtgcccc attttaaggt cggatgggca tgggtggacct gcagcagagt aatcttccca	180
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tggctcagta ctatgcagt gaggataacc tgggtactca agaacttttg gacagatgta	300
acaccaaact atgcagacat tttactgcat agcacttatt tcccttgctt tacagcggga	360
gaagtggaaa gggccatcag gggagaacaa ctgctgtctt gctgcagggt cccgagagct	420
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<210> SEQ ID NO 4
 <211> LENGTH: 2376
 <212> TYPE: DNA
 <213> ORGANISM: Human immunodeficiency virus

<400> SEQUENCE: 4

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<210> SEQ ID NO 5
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 <212> TYPE: DNA
 <213> ORGANISM: Human immunodeficiency virus

<400> SEQUENCE: 5

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gcggagaggc tggcagggtg agccctggga ggttctctcc agcactagca ggtagagcct      180
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cttgcttgct taaagccctc ttcaataaag ctgccatttt agaagtaagc tagtgtgtgt      300
tcccatctct cctagccgcc gcctgggtcaa ctcggtactc aataataaga agaccctggt      360
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<210> SEQ ID NO 6
 <211> LENGTH: 481
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 <213> ORGANISM: SV40

<400> SEQUENCE: 6

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tggcgaatgg agatccaatt tttaagtgtg taatgtgtta aactactgat tctaattgtt      180
tgtgtatttt agattcacag tcccaaggct catttcaggc ccctcagtcc tcacagtctg      240
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ccacacctcc ccctgaacct gaaacataaa atgaatgcaa ttgttgttgt taacttgttt      360
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<210> SEQ ID NO 7
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 <212> TYPE: DNA
 <213> ORGANISM: Simian immunodeficiency virus

<400> SEQUENCE: 7

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agacatttgg ctggctatgg aaattagtcc ctgtaaatgt atcagatgag gcacaggagg      180
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cagggttgagc cctgggaggt tctctccagc actagcaggt agagcctggg tgttcctgc	600
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What is claimed is:

1. A method of stimulating an immune response in a recipient against Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) comprising: administering to the recipient a DNA composition comprising a promoter sequence operably linked to a coding sequence, wherein the coding sequence encodes a gag gene of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), a pro gene of HIV, a vpx gene of Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV), a vpr gene of SIV, a vpu gene of HIV, a nef gene of HIV, a tat gene of HIV, an env gene of HIV, and a rev gene of HIV, with the coding sequence operably linked to a polyadenylation sequence, and wherein the DNA composition does not include functional reverse transcriptase (rt), integrase (int), and viral infectivity factor (vif) genes.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the coding sequence encodes at least one non-functional gene.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the promoter sequence is a 5' long terminal repeat (LTR) of SIV.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the polyadenylation sequence is an SV40 polyadenylation sequence.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the DNA composition is in a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

6. The method of claim 1 further comprising administering to the recipient at least one cytokine.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising administering to the recipient at least one anti-viral drug therapy.

8. A method of treating an HIV positive recipient comprising: administering to the recipient a DNA composition comprising: a promoter sequence operably linked to a coding sequence, wherein the coding sequence encodes a gag gene of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), a pro gene of HIV, a vpx gene of Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV), a vpr gene of SIV, a vpu gene of HIV, a nef gene of HIV, a tat gene of HIV, an env gene of HIV, and a rev gene of HIV, with the coding sequence operably linked to a polyadenylation sequence, and wherein the DNA composition does not include functional reverse transcriptase (rt), integrase (int), and viral infectivity factor (vif) genes.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the coding sequence encodes at least one non-functional gene.

10. The method of claim 8, wherein the promoter sequence is a 5' long terminal repeat (LTR) of SIV.

11. The method of claim 8, wherein the polyadenylation sequence is an SV40 polyadenylation sequence.

12. The method of claim 8, wherein the DNA composition is in a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

13. The method of claim 8 further comprising administering to the recipient at least one cytokine.

14. The method of claim 8, further comprising administering to the recipient at least one anti-viral drug therapy.

15. A method of vaccinating a recipient against HIV comprising: administering to the recipient a DNA composition comprising a promoter sequence operably linked to a coding sequence, wherein the coding sequence encodes a gag gene of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), a pro gene of HIV, a vpx gene of Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV), a vpr gene of SIV, a vpu gene of HIV, a nef gene of HIV, a tat gene of HIV, an env gene of HIV, and a rev gene of HIV, with the coding sequence operably linked to a polyadenylation sequence, and wherein the DNA composition does not include functional reverse transcriptase (rt), integrase (int), and viral infectivity factor (vif) genes.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the coding sequence encodes at least one non-functional gene.

17. The method of claim 15, wherein the promoter sequence is a 5' long terminal repeat (LTR) of SIV.

18. The method of claim 15, wherein the polyadenylation sequence is an SV40 polyadenylation sequence.

19. The method of claim 15, wherein the DNA composition is in a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

20. The method of claim 15 further comprising administering to the recipient at least one cytokine.

21. The method of claim 15 further comprising administering to the recipient at least one anti-viral drug therapy.

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